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Let facts determine Helms case

The ghost of Chilean President Salvador Allende haunted Richard M. Nixon. It troubled Gerald R. Ford so much that he was forced to order special intelligence oversight operations. Now the chains may still be clanking around the White House.

Within days of Allende's death in a coup Sept. 11, 1973, some leftists here and abroad began to voice suspicions that the Central Intelligence Agency might have been involved. Those suspicions were mostly written off. Radical paranoia and all that.

After a U.S. Senate committee began to share some of those suspicions, though, many Americans began to realize that even paranoid can have real enemies.

The stories came thick and fast. The CIA revealed that the U.S. government had targeted some \$11 million in covert-action money against Allende. It was revealed that "destabilizing" Allende's government — a nicely-nice term for subverting it — had been a stated U.S. intelligence aim. Officials of the giant International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. admitted they had pressured the CIA

and other agencies to overthrow Allende.

Former CIA Director Richard M. Helms and ITT chairman Harold S. Geneen were called before Congress to tell all. Some were shocked at what later came to be considered Nixon-era spy abuses. And there it ended. Until last week.

Confirming persistent rumors, a top aide to President Carter told reporters over breakfast that Helms is indeed under investigation for alleged perjury before two Senate panels.

The problem for Carter, the aide said, is deciding the extent of classified information he should release to federal prosecutors.

That extent should be clear. They should get whatever facts they need to demonstrate whether lies were indeed told. They are, presumably, trusted U.S. employes. Access to the material they need to do their lawful job would nicely mesh with one Carter campaign pledge: to expose past CIA abuses.

If Helms or others lied, they should be punished. If not, they should be cleared.

Only then will those chains stop rattling. Then the ghost might rest in peace.